

18 March 2010

Mr G O'Keeffe  
St James' Roman Catholic Voluntary Aided Primary School  
Solway Road  
Hebburn  
Tyne and Wear  
NE31 2BP

Dear Mr O'Keeffe

Ofsted monitoring of schools with a notice to improve

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave Joy Law and me when we inspected your school on 17 March 2010 and for the information which you provided during our visit. We also welcomed the opportunity to talk with other members of staff, pupils, the chair of governors and a local authority officer. Please pass on our thanks to all those involved.

As a result of the inspection on 12–13 November 2009, the school was asked to:

- Strengthen the procedures to safeguard pupils by ensuring that:
  - all necessary policies are in place, specific to the school and ratified by the governing body
  - governors have a complete understanding of their legal responsibilities and fulfil all statutory requirements
  - the supervision of pupils at lunchtimes is more effective.
  
- Establish a clear plan of action to promote community cohesion and develop pupils' awareness of the multicultural nature of the wider world.
  
- Raise standards, especially in English and science by:
  - using assessment of pupils' progress more effectively to plan work that is more challenging for all groups of pupils, especially the more able
  - ensuring that pupils work at a faster pace in lessons
  - introducing the existing plans for a more creative curriculum with a greater sense of urgency.



- Improve the quality and effectiveness of self-evaluation by ensuring that:
  - judgements on the school's work, and teaching in particular, are suitably balanced with more detailed areas for development
  - senior staff and governors have a more systematic and rigorous approach to monitoring the progress of the school's development.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time the school is making inadequate progress in addressing the issues for improvement and in raising the pupils' achievement.

Children enter the Reception Year with skills and knowledge that are generally below those typical for their age. The majority of children make good progress from their individual starting points in most areas of their learning, and enter Year 1 working at the expected level for their age group. At the end of Key Stage 2 in 2009, pupils attained broadly average standards in English and science and above average standards in mathematics. This represents satisfactory progress overall from the pupils' starting points in Year 1. However, most of the school's targets for 2010 are lower than those achieved in 2009, indicating that standards, especially in English and science, are not expected to rise. No clear explanation was offered to account for this. Whilst school leaders believe that pupils will make the nationally expected 2 levels of progress to achieve average standards at the end of Key Stage 2, they are unable to confidently predict pupils' likely performance this year. This is because the data the school holds about pupils' attainment is not being systematically monitored and analysed.

The majority of school policies and procedures related to safeguarding have been updated. These are mostly of a good quality and have been ratified by governors. Governors are now aware that all of the school's policies need to be reviewed annually. An up-to-date single central record of staff is in place. The headteacher and a governor have attended recent training in safer recruitment but as yet the school does not have a policy and all of the necessary procedures in place in order to comply fully with national guidance in respect of staff recruitment and selection. Four governors and most of the school staff - with the exception of lunchtime supervisors - have participated in recent child protection training. The named individuals for designated child protection have not had recent relevant training, although, as a result of the monitoring visit, this has now been scheduled to take place by the end of March 2010. The recording and reporting of accidents is inconsistent. While a carbonised book has recently been purchased to log accidents there are currently no formal procedures in place that provide comprehensive guidance and explain, for instance, how parents will be informed of any incidents. Appropriate risk assessments are now in place for the school premises and outings. An assessment of the school premises was undertaken in January 2010, but this is



not underpinned by a plan and/or a record that indicates if any issues were identified or any further actions required to address these.

The governing body has an increased awareness of the responsibility it has to challenge and hold the school to account and has a much better understanding of its legal responsibilities and statutory requirements. The chair of governors takes her role very seriously and since the last inspection has invested considerable time on a weekly basis to meet with the headteacher. This has secured the necessary changes to safeguarding policies and ensured governors have accessed appropriate training in respect of safeguarding and protecting children. Having focused all of their energies on addressing the safeguarding priorities, governors are aware that in doing so they have not brought enough pressure to bear on school leaders to secure rapid improvement on all the issues raised in the last inspection report.

Attendance is satisfactory and there have been no recent exclusions. In the five, part-lessons inspectors observed, pupils' behaviour was generally good. However, the same cannot be said of break and lunchtimes. Here the school has proved ineffective in tackling poor behaviour and has failed to ensure that lunchtime staff have received the appropriate training and support necessary to improve supervision. As a result break-time activities lack direction and purpose and there is very little positive interaction between pupils and supervisors. These are the major contributory factors behind the pupils' continuing poor behaviour at lunch and break times, which remain chaotic and ill-disciplined as a result.

Pupils say that bullying and name calling frequently take place at break times. They report that the actions staff take to deal with this are not always effective as some, 'bullies and children who misbehave don't care because it means they don't have to do school work'. While the school council has actively been engaged in consulting other pupils about the choice of new outdoor equipment for use at lunch and break times, these items are only just materialising and there is no plan of action in place to support their introduction and use them in order to improve matters. Although there are some good existing resources available, such as climbing apparatus, pupils were not making effective use of these.

The school does not have an effective plan in place to indicate how it intends to develop and fulfil its community cohesion function within or beyond the school. Recent whole school work themed around the Chinese New Year and occasional displays around the school and in classrooms indicate that there is some work being done to raise awareness of other cultures and faiths through the curriculum. Overall, though, pupils are not being provided with enough opportunities to engage in activities, such as trips and visits, or to develop external links that would help them understand their own community and the ethnic, social and economic characteristics of other local, national and global communities.



Whole school strategies and the impetus required to improve assessment, accelerate pupils' progress, raise standards and introduce the creative curriculum are still sorely lacking. School leaders do not plan their actions or check the school's progress rigorously enough or on a systematic basis. An accurate assessment of the school's strengths and weaknesses, founded on robust self-evaluation activities, has not yet emerged. For example, there has been no consideration of how to deploy the skills of the school's leading literacy teacher in order to accelerate pupils' progress in English, nor has there been any investigation to determine why pupils make much better progress in mathematics, which would have helped staff identify the strategies that are clearly working well here so as to apply them in other subjects. School leaders have not routinely undertaken lesson observations using a suitably robust framework. Consequently, they are unable to identify areas for development and have no clear understanding of what needs to be done to improve the quality of teaching and learning consistently throughout the school. Teachers, therefore, receive inadequate guidance, support and performance management from school leaders and have been left to soldier on and come up with their own individual strategies and solutions.

The local authority's statement of action fulfils requirements. The accompanying action plan is comprehensive and well-targeted. It provides a very clear picture for school leaders of the actions it needs to take to secure improvement and the resources it will provide to help them achieve this. Local authority officers and the School Improvement Partner have proffered strong support and guidance to the school. For instance, through the training provided for governors, regular meetings with the headteacher, and recent review of teaching and learning. To date these activities have had little impact on school improvement. This is because many of the aspects of support identified and suggested require the school to be proactive and take the initiative to access them; as yet this has not happened.

School leaders have many good intentions but to date they have failed to provide clear direction or drive through improvement with any sense of urgency. As a result this visit has raised very serious concerns about the school leaders' capacity to secure improvement.

I hope that you have found the visit helpful in promoting improvement in your school. This letter will be posted on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Wendy Ripley  
Her Majesty's Inspector

